

Pronoun-Antecedent Agreement

ACADEMIC VOCABULARY

antecedent: the word—noun or pronoun—that a pronoun replaces or refers to. The antecedent and pronoun can be in the same or different sentences, but they must agree in number, gender, and person.

number (in grammar): singular or plural

gender (in grammar): masculine, feminine, or neutral

person (in grammar): who is addressed by words or text, the first person (the person speaking); second person (person spoken to); or third person (“person” or other thing spoken about)

HERE’S HOW

Step 1: Review the types of personal pronouns.

Personal Pronouns		
	Singular	Plural
First Person	I, me, my, mine	we, us, ours
Second Person	you, your, yours	you, you, yours
Third Person (masculine)	he, him, his	--
Third Person (feminine)	she, her, hers	--
Third Person (neutral)	it, its	they, them, their, theirs

Step 2: Make sure that a pronoun has an antecedent. A pronoun is used to refer back to a noun or another pronoun, known as the **antecedent**. A pronoun must have an antecedent, or the meaning of the sentence is confusing and unclear.

Step 3: Make a pronoun agree with its antecedent in number. Singular antecedents require singular pronouns. Plural antecedents require plural pronouns.

EXAMPLES The zoo opens **its** gates at 9:00 A.M. (singular)

The *keepers* watch **their** animals closely. (plural)

Step 4: Make a pronoun and its antecedent agree in person. Avoid switching from one person to another in the same sentence or paragraph.

EXAMPLES *Incorrect:* Lions look mad when **your** manes are shaggy.

Correct: Lions look mad when **their** manes are shaggy. (third person)

Step 5: Be sure the gender of a pronoun and its antecedent match. Don’t use masculine pronouns when you mean to refer to both genders or to neutral gender. In some cases, use “he or she” and “his or her.” Or, make the antecedent plural.

EXAMPLES *Unclear:* Each *visitor* has **his** opinion about the exhibits.

Clear: Each *visitor* has **his or her** opinion about the exhibits.

Clear: All the *visitors* have **their** opinions about the exhibits.